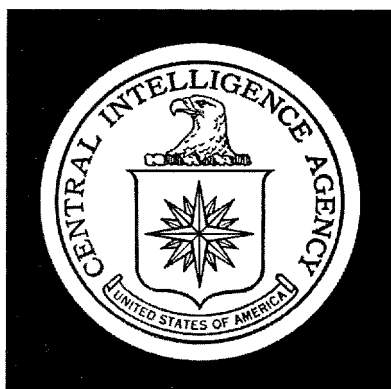


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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam

State Department review completed

Top Secret

110

12 March 1967

25X1

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Information as of 1600
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25X1

HIGHLIGHTS

Military action in South Vietnam heated up over the weekend with two major areas of clashes, one in Tay Ninh Province northeast of Saigon and the other just south of the Demilitarized Zone. In Saigon, the Constituent Assembly has reportedly completed its basic work on the new constitution although some problems remain to be worked out with the ruling Military Directorate. US air strikes on North Vietnamese industrial and other strategic targets on 11 and 12 March provoked an angry outcry from the Hanoi government which, as usual, alleged that there were civilian casualties.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
The heaviest fighting to date in Operation JUNCTION CITY occurred on 11-12 March when a series of battles between US and Communist forces took place (Paras. 1-2). Heavy fighting between Communist and ARVN troops was also reported in Quang Tri Province near the DMZ (Para. 3). Four prisoners have reported that the entire North Vietnamese 812th Regiment has recently moved back into northern Quang Tri from its redoubt in the DMZ (Para. 4). A Viet Cong defector has revealed what he claims is the Communist military plan for 1967 (Paras. 5-8).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
The Constituent Assembly has completed its basic work on the constitution but certain provisions apparently are not fully satisfactory to the Directorate (Paras. 1-5). A Viet Cong defector has provided some details on the Communists' program for countering the government's Revolutionary Development program (Paras. 6-8). The Communists are continuing to lose ground in Long An Province.

25X1

III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:
US aircraft attacked a series of North Vietnamese industrial targets over the weekend inflicting heavy damage, according to pilot reports. Four US aircraft were lost during the weekend raids (Paras. 1-3). North Vietnamese shore batteries inflicted minor damage on two US naval ships which returned the fire silencing the shore batteries (Para. 4). A third North Vietnamese river has been mined (Para. 5).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi's propaganda reaction to the latest US air strikes on DRV industrial targets has been to allege further injury to civilians (Paras. 1-3). A captured Communist document contains an unusual admission that North Vietnamese troops are serving in South Vietnam (Para. 4). There is nothing to confirm a press report that the chairman of the Liberation Front in South Vietnam has been replaced (Para. 5).

12 March 1967



I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Military activity in South Vietnam over the weekend was highlighted by the heaviest fighting to date between US and Communist forces in Operation JUNCTION CITY in northern Tay Ninh Province.

2. Following several enemy mortar attacks early on 11 March against US field positions, a series of encounters between Communist and US infantry units took place with US forces reportedly killing more than 250 Communists. The battles continued into 12 March. The largest engagement was reported on 11 March when US forces met with a battalion-size enemy force in a two-hour battle. The Americans were supported by US air strikes and artillery fire. American losses were light with a total of 21 killed and 73 wounded, according to preliminary reports.

3. In a severe clash just south of the DMZ on 11 March, two South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) battalions engaged an estimated two enemy battalions. Heavy contact was reported during the two-hour battle in which US tactical air strikes supported the friendly troops. Initial casualty reports show Communist losses of 136 killed with some unverified reports that as many as 300 enemy soldiers may have been killed. Reported ARVN losses totaled 12 killed and 68 wounded.

4. Preliminary field interrogations of four prisoners and information derived from recently captured documents indicate that all three battalions of the North Vietnamese 812th Regiment, 324B Division, have now moved back into north-central Quang Tri Province from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). One battalion of the 812th has been operating south of the DMZ for some months, but the rest of the regiment, along with the bulk of the 324B Division were pulled back into or just north of the DMZ last year after being hit by several US operations.

12 March 1967

I-1

Viet Cong Plans for 1967

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25X1

25X1

has revealed a rather ambitious plan to "solve the war" in 1967. The three-phase plan involves the engagement of allied troops in certain areas in an attempt to leave certain other strategic areas unprotected, thus subject to Communist seizure and control.

6. The first phase of the Viet Cong plan will be aimed at the northernmost provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien and south-central provinces of Quang Duc, Darlac, Khanh Hoa, and Phu Yen to lure allied forces from the more important central provinces of Pleiku, Kontum, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh.

7. Phase II will follow with strong attacks in the coastal provinces of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Khanh Hoa to attract more allied forces from the highlands region. In Phase III, the Communist main force units from the South Vietnamese - Cambodian border area will pour into the highlands to apply the "decisive blow."

8. The Communists may have a long-range plan along the lines drawn by the defector and they have particularly strong main force units in the areas he cited as targets for major operations. Total Allied strength, however, combined with mobility and fire power, makes it doubtful that the Communists will launch such a grandiose military venture any time soon. Nevertheless, enemy forces can be expected to attempt, whenever possible, to spread Allied forces thin and to pick on relatively weak and isolated units.

12 March 1967

I-2

II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The Constituent Assembly has completed its basic work on the constitution, except for a pre-amble, final polishing, and a final vote of adoption. At its sessions on 9 and 10 March, the assembly completed the final chapter on transitional arrangements. The deputies readily agreed that, in the interest of continuity and experience, the existing organs of government should continue until the agencies provided for in the constitution have been established. The chapter requires elections within six months for the president and one year for the legislature. The final chapter also permits the first elected president to appoint province chiefs during his first term.

2. The assembly, by near unanimity, extended its own existence as an interim legislature, although its own charter calls for dissolution when the constitution is completed. Sensitive to the possibility of negotiations in the near future, the deputies argued that the country must not be without an elected legislative body during the period of transition. There was some sentiment for an even stronger statement giving the assembly "full" legislative authority; it is noteworthy that this argument came from some members usually very responsive to the Directorate. It remains possible, however, that even the weaker provision adopted may encounter some Directorate opposition, since the latter's views on the assembly's interim role have never been spelled out. Moreover, at its 10 March session, the assembly approved an even stronger provision than was in its original draft concerning a prominent role for itself in regulating the forthcoming elections.

3. The assembly readily approved the continued existence of the Directorate and present cabinet in the interim period. There was considerable debate, however, over whether the extension should include the entire membership of these bodies or only their chairmen. Some deputies argued that extending them as entities would not allow for internal changes in their composition--e.g., changes of cabinet ministers.

12 March 1967

II-1

However, the assembly concluded that both bodies were "collective" in nature and must be treated as such in the provision.

4. Finally, the assembly decided to extend the present judicial system intact through the transitional period.

5. On 10 March, the assembly read another letter from chief of state General Thieu, who observed that, while he was pleased with the assembly's incorporation of many Directorate suggestions, certain provisions of the constitution are not fully satisfactory. There are indications, on the other hand, that the Directorate still hopes to avoid using its veto power. Thieu stated again, at a press conference on 10 March, that there remain "a few important questions" requiring agreement between the Directorate and the assembly, and indicated that he or some other member would address himself to these issues in an appearance before the assembly on 12 March. Thieu's public prediction that the government would not have to use its veto power, and private remarks to this effect by Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, suggest that the government still anticipates some modification of final wording before the assembly votes approval of the constitution as a whole. At present, it appears that leading figures in both the government and the assembly expect that the constitution will be completed by 27 March as scheduled and promulgated during the latter part of April.

Communist Techniques in Opposing the Revolutionary Development Program

6. A recent Viet Cong defector, [redacted]

[redacted] has provided information on Communist methods to counter the Revolutionary Development (RD) program.

25X1

25X1

7. The primary technique is to attempt to influence the people of an area against the Saigon government before the entry of RD teams. The people are told that GVN taxes are much heavier than Viet

12 March 1967

II-2

Cong taxes and that the GVN will take over and control all the land. When an RD team is already in an area, however, the Viet Cong send in observers to determine weak points of the program in order to exploit them. Communist attacks to drive the RD workers out are also planned, according to the source.

8. In areas where the RD teams have finished their work and departed, the Viet Cong attempt to use for their own ends any improvements which have been made. Rather than sabotage a new school building, for example, the Viet Cong would try to influence the teachers to teach Viet Cong policy and propaganda.

Continuing Allied Successes in Long An Province

9. Additional evidence has recently been received testifying to the favorable results of the special efforts being made to pacify the delta province of Long An. [REDACTED]

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Viet Cong morale has reached a new low. This is evident primarily in the large number of Viet Cong cadre who did not return to their duties after their Tet leave in early February.

10. A record number of Chieu Hoi ralliers in Long An Province during the last several weeks also indicates that Viet Cong morale is low. Some 227 ralliers returned to government control in February, almost triple the figure for any previous month. The rate continued high in the first week in March.

11. The single most impressive gain recently for the Saigon government in Long An Province came on 7 March when US and ARVN troops moved into Long Huu village without incident. The village is on an island located in one of the important shipping channels leading to Saigon. This operation was noteworthy because of the friendly attitude displayed by the villagers who appeared pleased that the government had resumed control over the area after some two years of Communist domination. A number of villagers

12 March 1967

II-3

had made clandestine contacts with the government's district chief before the allied reoccupation. The fact that a relatively large number of able-bodied, draft-age males remained in the village also indicates that the Viet Cong had been unsuccessful in their conscription efforts.

12 March 1967

II-4



III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. Four American aircraft were downed in North Vietnam over the weekend as US pilots struck the iron and steel plant at Thai Nguyen, the Bac Giang power plant on 11 March, and the Viet Tri power plant and the Hon Gai explosive storage area on 12 March.

2. US aircraft attacking the Thai Nguyen steel plant on 11 March for the second consecutive day again met stiff resistance. Three US Air Force Thunderchiefs were downed in the target area by ground fire. No rescue attempts were possible due to the location. Preliminary field reports indicate that the attack was successful with large fires reported throughout the target area. No Communist MIGs were encountered on either 11 or 12 March.

3. A fourth US aircraft--a US Navy A-4E Skyhawk--was lost in an attack against the Long Can SAM support facility about 15 miles northwest of Haiphong on 11 March. The aircraft was hit by a SAM and the pilot was later captured. The installation was destroyed by US aircraft and several missiles were observed burning on the ground.

US Ships Hit by Communist Shore Batteries

4. The Destroyer Keppler and the heavy cruiser Canberra, participating in Operation SEA DRAGON, suffered minor damage from fragmentation shells fired by a shore battery about 40 miles northeast of Vinh on 11 March. The ships were shelling a group of six 50-foot barges when they were brought under fire. Seven crew members were wounded, two seriously. These are the first casualties inflicted on US naval personnel from North Vietnamese shore batteries. A third ship, the destroyer Ingersoll, joined the Keppler and the Canberra and silenced the enemy guns.

12 March 1967

III-1

Another North Vietnamese River Mined

5. A third North Vietnamese river has been mined by US Navy aircraft. On 10 March, A-6 aircraft mined the mouth of the Kien Giang River near Dong Hoi. Both magnetic and acoustic bottom-type mines--which are effective against all motor-driven craft and any sailed-powered, wooden craft carrying metallic cargo such as fuel drums or ammunition--were deployed. The first two rivers--the Song Ca and the Song Gianh--were mined on 26 February.

12 March 1967

III-2

IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

12 March 1967

IV-1

25X1

V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Hanoi has issued a barrage of official statements denouncing the latest US air strikes on industrial targets. The statements feature new charges that civilians have been killed and wounded by the air strikes. A Foreign Ministry statement on 11 March alleged that populated areas in Haiphong were hit by US missiles, many civilians killed and many houses destroyed. The statement also charged that in Hon Gai a kindergarten was demolished and a Catholic church completely destroyed, with the deaths of many children and adults.

2. The DRV Government also lodged "urgent" official protests with the ICC alleging US air strikes on 10 and 12 March hit civilian areas in Thai Nguyen, Hon Gai, Haiphong, and Hanoi. Also on 10 March, the North Vietnamese Ministry of Water Conservancy issued a statement charging that US aircraft and warships have been attacking North Vietnam's dike system in Nghe An Province.

3. Peking has been echoing the Hanoi charges, emphasizing the line that such actions by the US prove that US peace offers cannot be trusted. The Soviet news agency TASS on 11 March charged that the US attacks on the Thai Nguyen steel plant had further escalated the war.

Admission That North Vietnamese are in South Vietnam

4. A captured document prepared by the Communists as a guide for cadre, party members, and others in answering questions likely to be put to them by the public during their propaganda missions in this year's Tet truce, made the unusual admission that there are North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam. A suggested answer to the question, "Is

12 March 1967

V-1

25X1

North Vietnam bringing troops to South Vietnam?" stated that, "South Vietnam and North Vietnam are of the same country; North Vietnam is providing us everything we need, including soldiers, to fight the Americans." The guide went on to suggest that the North Vietnamese presence be justified by arguing that people of the same country should help each other and that it is illogical for the Americans to claim that the North Vietnamese are invaders when "almost 500,000 Americans and satellite troops" have come to "devastate our country."

Liberation Front Chairman

[redacted]
in Saigon report that they have no information to confirm a press report that the chairman of the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam has been replaced. Both sources have indicated their skepticism of this story [redacted]
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12 March 1967

V-2

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